

METHOD AND MACHINE FOR LABELLING A SUCCESSION OF
5 CONTAINERS BY MEANS OF A NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT
LABELLING STATIONS

TECHNICAL FIELD

10 The present invention relates to a method of
labelling a succession of containers.

The present invention may be used to particular
advantage for labelling a succession of bottles in a
bottling plant, to which the following description
15 refers purely by way of example.

A bottling plant comprises a number of bottling
lines, each comprising a succession of machines
arranged in series. More specifically, each bottling
line may comprise a filling machine for receiving empty
20 bottles from a store and filling each with a
predetermined amount of a liquid product; a capping
machine for applying a cap to each bottle; a labelling
machine for applying one or more labels to each bottle;
and, possibly, a packing machine for packing a group of
25 bottles to form a respective package.

BACKGROUND ART

Known labelling machines, such as the type
described in DE19927668, DE3925842, US5478422A1,

US5259913A1 or EP1167213A1, comprise a vertical-axis carousel conveyor for feeding the bottles along an annular path through at least one labelling station, where a label is applied to each bottle. Known
5 labelling machines may comprise either one labelling station, or two (or more) for applying, for example, a front and rear label to each bottle.

Known bottling plants of the above type are relatively bulky and expensive by requiring an
10 independent bottling line for each type of liquid product. Alternatively, the same bottling line may be used for different liquid products, but only at the expense of frequent type changes (i.e. to adapt the bottling line to a different liquid product), thus
15 obviously reducing overall output.

DISCLOSURE OF INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to provide a method of labelling a succession of containers, designed to eliminate the aforementioned
20 drawbacks, and which, in particular, is cheap and easy to implement.

According to the present invention, there is provided a method of labelling a succession of containers, whereby each container is fed along a
25 labelling path through a number of labelling stations, each for applying a respective label to a container travelling through the labelling station; the method being characterized by assigning a category of

containers to each labelling station; identifying each container to assign to the container one of a number of possible types before the container is fed along the labelling path; and only activating each labelling station to apply the label to the container travelling through the labelling station if the container falls within the category of containers assigned to the labelling station.

The present invention also relates to a machine for labelling a succession of containers.

According to the present invention, there is provided a machine for labelling a succession of containers, the machine comprising a conveyor for feeding each container along a labelling path; and a number of labelling stations, each located along the labelling path and for applying a respective label to a container travelling through the labelling station; the machine being characterized by comprising a recognition device for identifying each container and assigning to the container one of a number of possible types before the container is fed along the labelling path; each labelling station comprising respective control means for memorizing a category of containers assigned to the labelling station, and which only activate the respective labelling station to apply the label to the container travelling through the labelling station if the container falls within the category of containers assigned to the labelling station.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A non-limiting embodiment of the present invention will be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

5 Figure 1 shows a schematic plan view, with parts removed for clarity, of part of a bottling plant featuring the labelling machine according to the present invention;

Figure 2 shows a larger-scale plan view of the
10 Figure 1 labelling machine.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

Number 1 in Figure 1 and 2 indicates as a whole a bottling line for filling bottles 2. Bottling line 1 comprises a known filling machine 3 for receiving empty
15 bottles 2 from an input conveyor 4, and feeding full bottles 2 to a labelling machine 5 by means of an intermediate conveyor 6. On labelling machine 5, a label 7 is applied to each bottle 2, and bottles 2 are then fed onto an output conveyor 8, which feeds bottles
20 2 to a known packing machine (not shown).

Filling machine 3 is a so-called multiple type for filling bottles 2 with four types of liquid of different colours, and comprises a vertical-axis carousel conveyor 9 for receiving empty bottles 2 from
25 input conveyor 4 by means of a transfer drum 10, and for feeding full bottles 2 to a vertical-axis carousel conveyor 11 by means of a transfer drum 12. Carousel conveyor 11 is connected to a known capping station 13

where a cap (not shown) is applied to each bottle 2, and the full, capped bottles 2 are fed by carousel conveyor 11 to intermediate conveyor 6 by means of a transfer drum 14.

5 Labelling machine 5 comprises a conveyor 15 for feeding a succession of bottles 2 along a labelling path P, which extends from the output of intermediate conveyor 6 to the input of output conveyor 8 via a recognition station 16 and four labelling stations 17.

10 As shown in Figure 2, conveyor 15 comprises a screw 18 located at the output of intermediate conveyor 6 and for equally spacing bottles 2 supplied by intermediate conveyor 6; and a transfer drum 19 is located at the end of screw 18 to feed bottles 2 to a
15 carousel conveyor 20 having a vertical axis 21, and along the periphery of which are located recognition station 16 and the four labelling stations 17. More specifically, carousel conveyor 20 comprises a central hub 22, from which radiate a number of spokes 23
20 supporting a circular rim 24 for feeding bottles 2 along labelling path P; and carousel conveyor 20 is connected to a transfer drum 25 for extracting bottles 2 from carousel conveyor 20 and feeding bottles 2 to output conveyor 8.

25 Each labelling station 17 comprises a known labelling device 26, e.g. of the type described in Patent Application EP1122175A1 (in general, each labelling device 26 provides for applying any type of

label 7, e.g. hot-glued, cold-glued, or self-adhesive);
and each labelling device 26 withdraws a label 7 from a
respective known store (not shown in detail) and
applies label 7 to a bottle 2 travelling past labelling
5 device 26. A known fixed pad 27 downstream from each
labelling device 26 performs a rolling operation on
each bottle 2 to ensure firm adhesion of label 7
applied to bottle 2 by labelling device 26.

In an embodiment not shown, each labelling device
10 26 is mounted on a carriage slidable along a guide, and
is movable along the guide by an actuating device to
adapt its position with respect to carousel conveyor 20
as a function of the shape and size of bottles 2.

Recognition station 16 comprises a recognition
15 device 28 in turn comprising an optical sensor 29 for
identifying, and assigning one of four possible types
to, each bottle 2 travelling through recognition
station 16. Sensor 29 typically identifies each bottle
2 according to its colour (as produced by the colour of
20 the liquid inside bottle 2, and also by the colour of
bottle 2 itself). Alternatively, sensor 29 may identify
each bottle 2 according to its shape and/or size.

In an alternative embodiment not shown, as opposed
to recognition device 28, recognition station 16
25 comprises a communication device for identifying each
bottle 2 by processing information from machines
upstream from labelling machine 5, and in particular
from filling machine 3.

Each labelling station 17 comprises a control unit 30 connected to recognition device 28, and which memorizes a category of bottles 2 so as to only activate labelling station 17 to apply label 7 to the bottle 2 travelling through labelling station 17 if bottle 2 falls within the category of bottles 2 assigned to labelling station 17. The category of bottles 2 memorized in each control unit 30 and assigned to respective labelling station 17 is normally defined by a variable number of bottle types equal to or greater than zero. Obviously, if the number equals zero, the labelling station 17 is never activated.

In actual use, labelling machine 5 is supplied by filling machine 3 with a succession of bottles 2 of four different types. As each bottle 2 travels through recognition station 16, recognition device 28 identifies and communicates the type of bottle 2 to control units 30 of labelling stations 17; and, as each bottle 2 travels through a labelling station 17, the labelling station 17 is only activated by respective control unit 30 to apply the corresponding label 7 to bottle 2 if the type of bottle 2 falls within the category memorized in respective control unit 30, i.e. only if the type of bottle 2 falls within the category of bottles 2 assigned to the labelling station 17.

Each labelling station 17 may obviously apply labels to bottles 2 of one or more types, and the number of types of bottles 2 supplied to labelling

machine 5 may obviously be other (more or less) than four.

In another embodiment, each labelling station 17 can adjust the position in which respective label 7 is applied to corresponding bottle 2 as a function of the type of bottle 2.

Labelling machine 5 as described above therefore provides for applying labels 7 to different types of bottles 2, and can therefore be connected to a multiple filling machine 3 or to a number of single filling machines 3, thus reducing the overall size and cost of the bottling plant.

Moreover, labelling machine 5 provides for applying labels 7 to different types of bottles 2 with no type change required, and is therefore suitable for use on bottling lines involving frequent changes in the type of bottles produced.